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ABSTRACT

Small Group Instructional Diagnosis (SGID) is a formative evaluation process used in the Seattle Community College District (SCCD) to help instructors assess their effectiveness and improve their performance in class. Instructors invite a SGID facilitator to meet with their classes in the middle of the term. In the instructor's absence, students are divided into small groups to discuss what they like about the class, factors that help and hinder their learning, and suggestions they have for the instructor. The interchange between the students and the facilitator is confidential and may be communicated only to the instructor who has requested the assessment. After the facilitator reports the students' perceptions to the instructor, the instructor brings the report to class for further discussion and clarification. As a result of SGID, faculty members in the SCCD have changed their instructional procedures, sometimes dramatically, with the number of changes increasing as instructors grow more experienced with SGID. Reported changes include choosing new textbooks, restructuring the course, revising test procedures, and allotting extra time for class discussion. Faculty have also indicated that the SGID has had a positive effect on their students' in-class participation, attendance, and submission of assignments. The success of SGID may be attributed to its mid-term timing, the use of a facilitator, its supportive character, and, in the case of the SCCD, support from the college administration and the help of an SGID coordinator. (MDB)

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POST-TENURE INSTRUCTIONAL ASSESSMENT: A PROCESS THAT HELPS MATURE FACULTY MAINTAIN AND INCREASE INSTRUCTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

AACJC Convention, 1988

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As the community college movement matures, one of the challenges confronting us is how to help faculty maintain the dedication and commitment that have made community colleges the success story of the 20th century in higher education. In particular, teachers as responsible professionals must assess the effectiveness of their work so that they may improve its quality.

Unfortunately few approaches to assessment provide the type of information that promotes instructional improvement, despite John Centra's (1981, p.10) statement that assessment practices ought to "provide the teacher--or possibly a development specialist--with the kind of diagnostic information that can be used to modify and improve what a teacher does."

Small Group Instructional Diagnosis (SGID), a relative newcomer among assessment instruments, satisfies Centra's criterion. Used in the Seattle Community Colleges more extensively than elsewhere, SGID has proved its worth to the satisfaction of faculty and administration alike.

The SGID enables tenured faculty to assess their effectiveness and improve their performance. Surprisingly, SGID is effective throughout the curriculum. It works equally well for instructors of typing, chemistry, welding, and philosophy. The few cases in which SGID has not been beneficial are the "tough cases"--fortunately few in number. These faculty, probably fewer than 5% of the total, refuse to recognize deficiencies in performance despite strong evidence that performance is below the standard of acceptability.

The SGID Process

SGID is a formative process which asks students to participate in a midterm dialogue focused on their learning experiences. Invented by D. Joseph Clark (1982), analyzed by Mark V. Redmond (1982) and updated by William E. Bennett (1987), SGID is initiated by an instructor's request for assessment, usually scheduled during the three or four weeks at midterm. The request may be made by mail (see Appendix for the SGID announcement form and the reservation confirmation form) or it may be arranged informally between colleagues.

On the appointed day, the SGID facilitator is introduced to the class as a colleague who has been invited to help the students prepare an analysis of their learning experiences.

For the next 25 or 30 minutes, the facilitator helps the students analyze their collective experience. The facilitator begins by dividing the class into groups of four or five people--the small groups for which the process is named. The students consider three questions: "What helps you learn?" "What does not help?" "What do you suggest to improve your learning?" After ten minutes discussion in the groups, the class receives group reports and seeks to identify major themes.

The facilitator records the results on the chalk board. That record becomes the official report.

When the facilitator presents the report to the instructor, he or she acts as spokesperson for the students, articulating their ideas in their words. These reporting sessions can become valuable conversations about good teaching, especially when the two instructors have exchanged roles by facilitating SGID's in one another's classes (see Appendix for a sample response sheet).

After preliminary interpretation, the instructor brings the report to class to discuss its contents. During this discussion, the students clarify any points that may have been obscure. Then the instructor acknowledges the major themes in the report. This moment is particularly fertile. The students listen with heightened sensitivity due to their profound involvement in preparing the report. They listen to explanations with great appreciation. And if the instructor adopts even one suggestion from the student list, the students are likely to show signal gratification.

The dialogue may end at this point with the instructor's commitment to act--or the dialogue may continue through additional interchanges as instructor and students adjust the conditions that enhance learning.

Success in Improving Instruction

As a result of SGID, faculty change their instructional procedures, sometimes dramatically. In a recent survey, half the faculty that had experienced SGID, analyzed their experiences. 95% of the respondents had made significant instructional adjustments during the SGID. Moreover, the number of changes increased as the instructor's experience with SGID increased. Although this was hardly surprising, it provided reassuring evidence of SGID's beneficent influence. It showed that instructors found benefit in repeated use of SGID.

Major changes during SGID were commonplace. Faculty reported selecting new textbooks, restructuring the course, revising test procedures, allotting extra time for class discussion. One instructor said, "The SGID enables me to 'fine tune' the course, adjusting my presentation to the needs of a particular class."

Changes in student behavior regularly accompanied SGID. Faculty participating in the survey said that SGID promoted lively discussion in class, improved attendance, and even seemed to enhance the reliability with which students submitted work. One regular user of SGID called it "a mid-term 'tonic.'"

Of course faculty reported high satisfaction with SGID. Fewer than 1% planned not to continue using it. 82% of those who had used more than one form of assessment, rated SGID as the best available.

The Reasons for SGID's Success

SGID's contribution to instructional improvement may be explained in several ways. Of primary importance may be the mid-term timing and the use of a facilitator. The importance of these features for other forms of assessment was pointed out by Peter Cohen (1980) whose meta-analysis of student-evaluation studies showed that instructional improvement occurred when assessment was conducted at mid-term and that improvement was enhanced when evaluation was supported by consultation with an evaluation officer. The importance of mid-term timing is apparent--the instructor has the option to respond during the second half of the term to suggestions made at mid-term. Less clear is the role of the consultant. In Cohen's survey, consultants were experts who provided specific instructional analysis and/or recommendations for improvement. In our use of SGID, however, the facilitator is a colleague who makes no pretentions to expertise. To be sure, on fortuitous occasions the interaction between facilitator and instructor includes careful analysis of problems and exploration of solutions. More frequently, the conversation focuses on understanding the content of the student report and nothing more. Nevertheless, even in the latter cases, the facilitator probably contributes to the climate supporting instructional change.

Another reason for SGID's success is its supportive spirit. The formative purpose of SGID is stressed by everyone involved in the process. And the confidentiality of the results prevents those results from being used for non-formative purposes. As a result, an instructor's use of SGID entails no job-threatening consequences.

Finally and perhaps most importantly, SGID is dialogic in form. The instructor initiates the dialogue and, in effect, asks the questions which the students answer. As question-asker, the instructor is particularly prepared to listen to the answers. Moreover, the student contribution to the dialogue is of exceptionally high quality, and therefore worthy of respectful listening. Notice, for example, the report in the Appendix.

In the calculus class that prepared this report, every group drew attention to the somewhat scattered style of presentation. Then the class generated a remarkably sensible solution. As you can see, in order to solve the problems of rapid delivery marred by mechanical errors and by a tendency to continue presentation of a problem in any bare space on the board, the students suggested that the instructor create a few, clear, accurate examples that could be planned ahead and presented systematically on the board. They suggested that this solution would also address the problem created by the absence of an adequate textbook.

Of course not every group in that class proposed this highly sensible solution, but every group addressed the problems and as solutions were proposed, the students considered them carefully. Each was found wanting until the recorded solution was presented. After thoughtful contemplation, every one agreed that it made sense.

The SGID's impact on students is easily explained. 1) Students enjoy being consulted. 2) The process catapults them into active participation in their own education--for the first time in some instances. 3) Most importantly, students enjoy thinking together seriously. They profit both from the serious thinking and from the newly opened interaction with people with whom they have experienced weeks of silent association.

Administration of SGID

The SGID does not flourish in a vacuum in the Seattle Community Colleges. Participation is encouraged by the agreement between the Board of Trustees and the Federation of Teachers. The agreement calls for annual faculty evaluation--leaving the form of that evaluation to the discretion of the individual instructor.

A valuable component of an effective program is a faculty coordinator. We have found that a person released from one-third of his or her teaching responsibility can coordinate 30 to 40 SGID's per term. The official coordinator facilitates more than half of the SGID's and schedules volunteers who handle the rest--each volunteer facilitator providing one or two SGID's per term.

The presence of an SGID Coordinator on campus has other advantages since the SGID format can be used in a variety of ways, for example to assess the effectiveness of a program, to assess the practices in an administrative unit, to initiate long-range planning, etc.

Supervision of the SGID program is provided by the district Coordinator of Faculty Development. He or she meets at least quarterly with the campus SGID Coordinators in order to 1) plan the training program for volunteer facilitators, 2) maintain quality control, and 3) solve problems that arise. The Appendix contains administrative charts showing the structure of the college district as well as the structure of Faculty Development.

Conclusion

SGID is a new solution, to an old problem. And solutions need to be rethought every few years, as Gilbert Highet (1976) pointed out a few years ago.

This new solution has proved its utility in every academic setting in the Seattle Community Colleges. It has enabled faculty to respond to problems in particular classes. Its regular use has assured the college that instructional effectiveness is being assessed systematically.

With the exception of the small number of tough cases, faculty have found SGID to be a valuable professional resource. Tenured faculty in particular found that SGID enabled them to assess their teaching effectiveness and improve.

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APPENDIX

faculty development
Seattle Community College District

S.G.I.D. - SMALL GROUP INSTRUCTIONAL DIAGNOSIS

WHAT IS IT? It's a way for you to get feedback from students about their learning experiences in your class.

HOW DOES IS WORK? You invite a facilitator who has had training in the SGID process (the Faculty Development Coordinator or another trained instructor) to meet with you class. When the facilitator arrives, you leave, and your students are asked these questions:

1. What do you like about this course? What helps your learning.
2. What hinders your learning and needs improvement?
3. What suggestions do you have for the instructor?

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE? About 30 minutes.

WHO GETS THE FEEDBACK? Only you. The interchange between students and facilitators is confidential and may be communicated only to the instructor involved.

WHY HAVE IT DONE? It's a way of getting helpful information from students which you can put to use immediately. Sometimes minor changes in how you conduct a course can produce major changes in a student's success.

It provides an opportunity for students to tell one another how the behavior of other students in the class affects their learning.

It communicates to the students your sincere interest in their learning and often generates an increased level of participation in your class.

It fulfills our contractual obligations to conduct student evaluations of our courses.

WHO HAS TRIED IT? More than 200 instructors throughout the Seattle Community College District.

HOW EFFECTIVE IS IT? "I believe it is the best way I've ever seen yet to get input from the group...."

"....gave me new insight as to ways of instructing, listening and preparing for a class."

"It forces students to think of ways of implementing change from an instructor's perspective."

If the SGID occurs mid-quarter or before, you have an opportunity to make changes in your course in response to the feedback you receive, so now is the time to think about having it done. To request a facilitator for an SGID, fill in the request form below and return it to Bill Bennett, 1DO 100.

SGID REQUEST FOR FACILITATOR Return to: Bill Bennett, 1DO 100

NAME _____ CAMPUS _____

DIVISION _____ PHONE _____

DATE REQUESTED _____ ROOM _____ TIME _____

mm
10/10/86

faculty development
Seattle Community College District

300 Elliott Avenue West
1DO 100
Seattle, Washington 98119
587-5480

Thank you for requesting the **Small Group Instructional Diagnosis.** The SGID is scheduled for your class on _____. The facilitator will be _____.

The procedure is a simple one. It takes about half an hour, so the facilitator will arrive about 15 minutes past the hour.

1. As soon as you reach a convenient stopping place, introduce the facilitator as a colleague/friend who is here to help you learn about your teaching (avoid the use of the word **evaluation.**)

2. The facilitator will explain the process to the students, emphasizing that the purpose is to give you assistance and that the results will be completely confidential.

3. The facilitator will ask the students to divide into small groups. The facilitator will ask, "Which class activities help you learn?" "Which do not help?" "What suggestions can you offer to improve the class?" Then the facilitator will write on the board, "Helpful" "Not Helpful" "Suggestions"

4. The groups will discuss the questions for 7-10 minutes.

5. The facilitator will then record class responses on the board.

6. The responses will be delivered to you as soon as possible. No one else will receive a copy.

7. As soon as you have analyzed the results of the SGID, you should discuss the results with your class. If you adjust even one small part of your instruction in response to their requests, they are likely to be extremely appreciative.

Most faculty find the SGID a valuable dialogue with students which leads to important changes in student motivation. Apparently as students become involved in even small decisions about the course, they become more active participants in the learning process. Frequently they also gain increased respect for the instructor as a person genuinely concerned about their learning.

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Are there special questions you would like the facilitator to ask? If so, please list them below and hand them to the facilitator when he/she arrives to conduct the SGID.

faculty development
Seattle Community College District
300 Elliott Avenue West Seattle, WA 98119
1DO 100 587-5480

SMALL GROUP INSTRUCTIONAL DIAGNOSIS — REPORT TO INSTRUCTOR

Instructor _____ Date _____ Course _____

The following responses were contributed by the students in one of your classes. The responses reflect student perceptions on the day of the SGID. Please treat these responses as the first step in a dialogue between the class and you. The second step should be discussion in which you and the class agree on a plan of action with respect to at least one of the items among their responses (this plan might include things they will do as well as things you will do). The third step is implementation of the plan. If you wish, a fourth step can conclude the dialogue — final student assessment of satisfaction with the course.

I. Which class activities help you learn?

-Good examples

-Answers in the book

-Explanations, especially step-by-step

-Taking problems home to work -

variety of kinds of problems

applications to real life

II. Which class activities do not help you learn?

-Book neither covers material in detail nor follows order of class

-Sometimes talks too fast-

-Sometimes errors, perhaps due to speed

-Book explanations often confusing
-Flipping between book and handouts

-Jumping around on board- writing wherever there is space

-Once a week we get a handout w/o explanation

III. What suggestions can you offer to improve the class?

Try for a few clear, accurate examples, or slow down the explanation

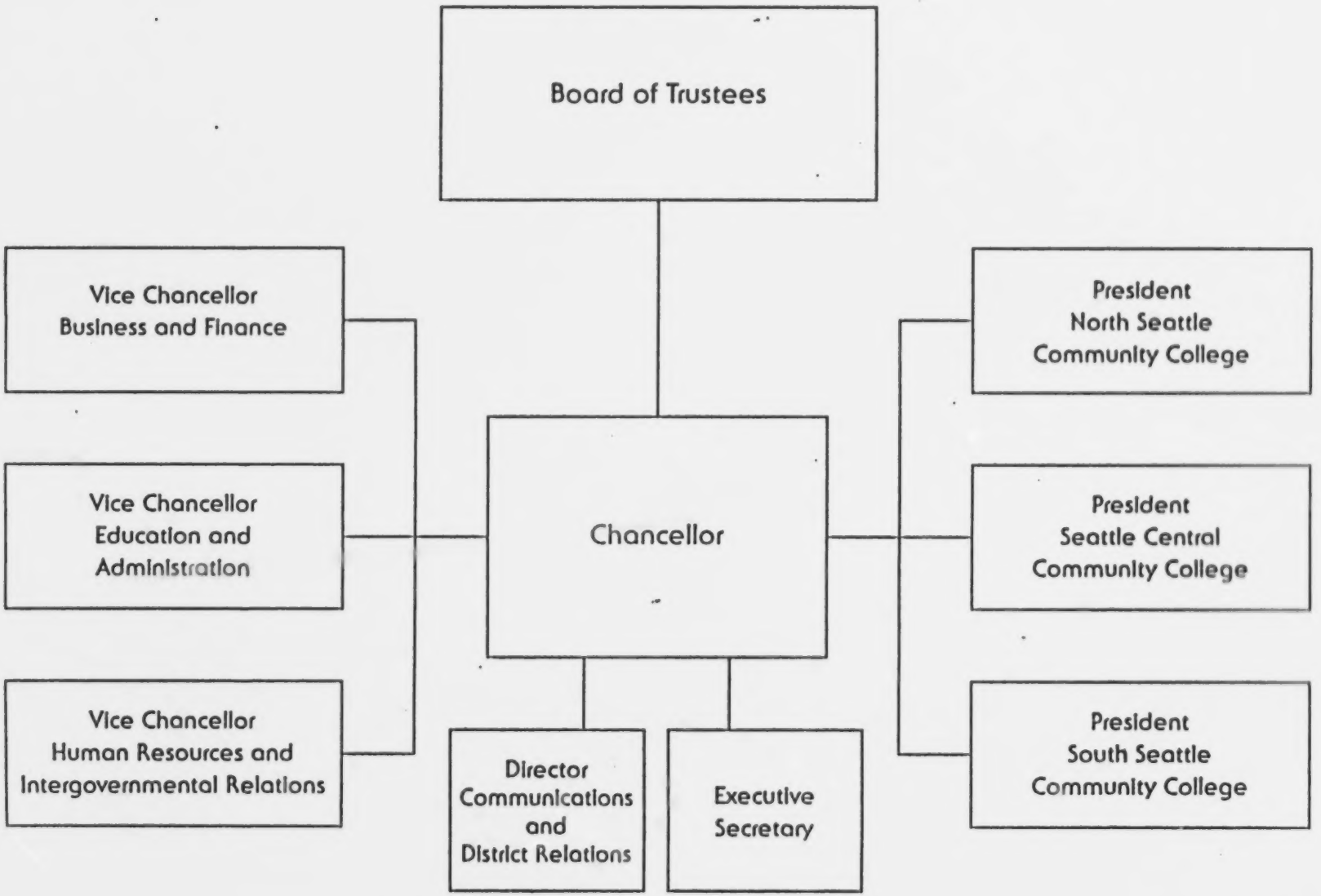
When there is an error, we lose the flow. Please start over again.

Consider using handouts as text-

Plan ahead, please

Be sure you tell us the plan-

SEATTLE COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT



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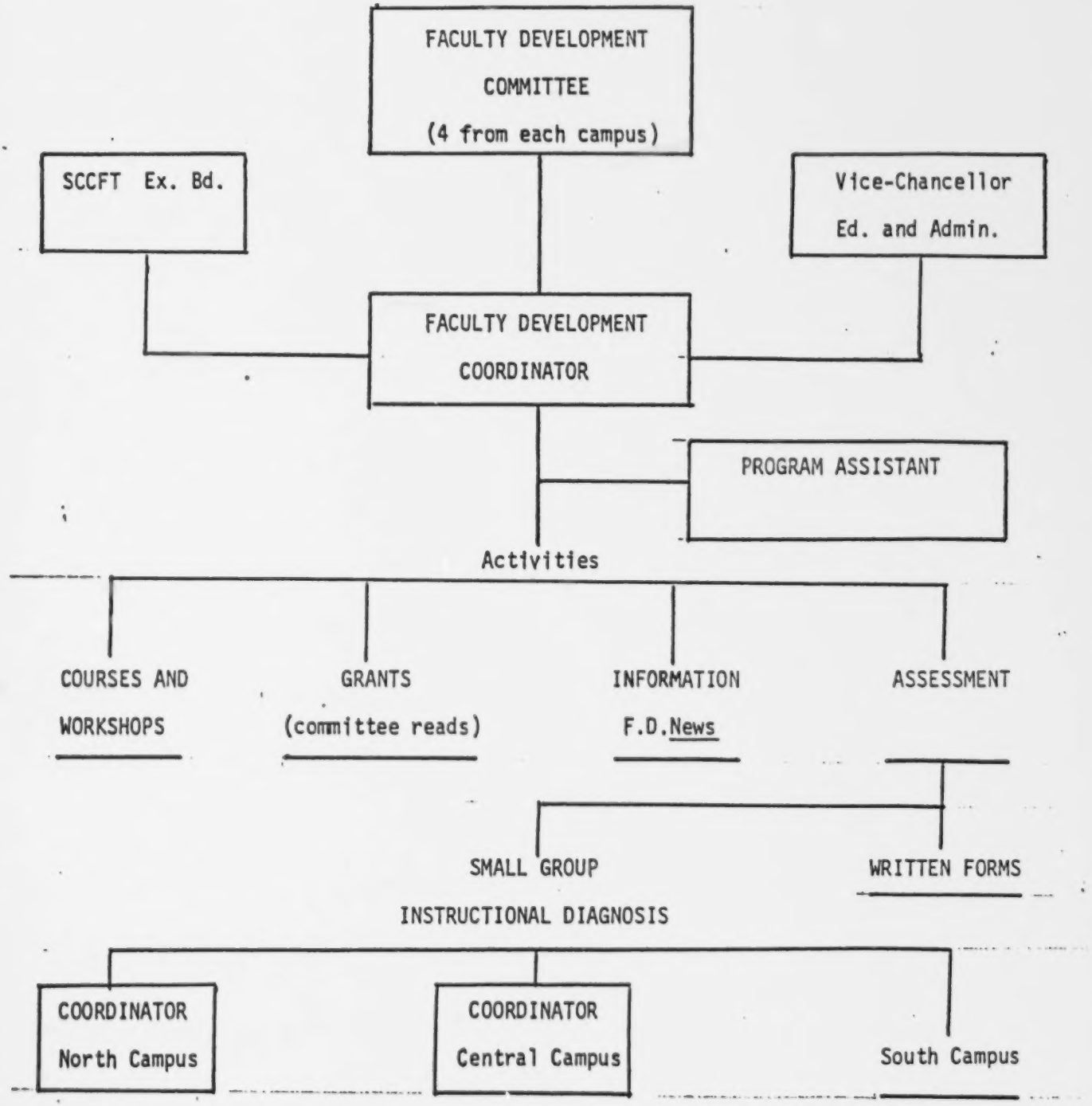

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